

Monthly S&T Highlights from Japan
NSF Tokyo Office - September 2001

1. **[Five Corporations to be Abolished]**
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3. **[University-oriented Venture Business]**
4. **[Genetic Analysis of *Koji* by Industry-University-Government efforts]**
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1. **[Five Corporations to be Abolished]** Ministries and agencies replied to the central government that only five corporations can be abolished out of the 160 corporations which the Government asked them to review. Of them S&T-related corporations are NASDA (National Space Development Agency of Japan) and JKTC (Japan Key Technology Center). NASDA will be merged with the NAL (National Aerospace Laboratory) and ISAS (Institute for Space and Astronomical Science) in 2003. JKTC will be abolished in 2003. (Summary translation of an article on Nihon Keizai Shimbun - 9/5/01)

2. **[Profit from Research Results]** MEXT's (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) Committee for discussing the shift for national universities to become independent administrative agencies has released an interim report. It included the following points. The president will be selected internally. Vice Presidents will be selected each from the research, education, and finance sectors on the basis of external search. Faculty members will be hired based on solicitation and a merit system will be introduced. The organization chart below the division level will be left with the discretion of universities. It will become easier to conduct research with industry-university-government collaboration. The universities can make profit through their educational and research activities. The faculty members will be able to have outside-university jobs. The amount of the tuition will be decided at each university's discretion within the guidelines set up by the government. The contributions from the local bodies will be counted as the university's profit. The faculty members will be able to choose their status; whether they will be public servants or not. (Summary translation of an article on Asahi Newspaper - 9/21/01)

3. **[University-oriented Venture Business]** MEXT (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) will launch "Industry-university-government System Reform Plan." MEXT will make a solicitation to industries for new research ideas, and then have them collaborate with university researchers. MEXT will provide up to Yen 50 million (ca. \$430,000) to each project. Also, the venture companies that are established based on the research results at the universities will receive research funds of up to Yen 50 million (ca. \$430,000) for the first 2-3 years. It will also be possible for the venture companies to have its HQs in the university campuses. MEXT will provide supplemental funds for hiring experts of management and IPR. (Summary translation of an article on Nihon Keizai Shimbun - 9/6/01)

4. **[Genetic Analysis of *Koji* by Industry-University-Government efforts]** Seven food companies have set up a consortium together with three independent administrative agencies and four universities to promote genetic research on *Koji* (ferment bacillus) and produce a database of its basic sequences by 2003 to elucidate its nature at a genetic level. The enzymes produced by *Koji* are expected to be used in medical and pharmaceutical fields. The consortium will develop a "microorganism plant" to study the function of enzymes and produce chemical goods without producing harmful wastes. (Summary translation of an article on Nihon Keizai Shimbun - 9/22/01)

5. **[Genetic Information to be Used by Industry-University-Government]** The genetic information held by the Kazusa DNA Research Institute, a non-profit corporation, will be used to develop medical and pharmaceutical products by industry-university-government efforts. "Development of next-generation state-of-the-art technologies using genetic information" has been adopted as the Science and Technology Corporation's (JST) project and will involve 11 companies and research institutes, including Kazusa DNA Research Institute. The project will last for five years from October 2001 through September 2006 with funds of Yen 3.4 billion (ca. US\$29 million). (Summary translation of an article on Nihon Keizai Shimbun - 9/21/01)

6. **[Progress in the Toyama Plan]** The details of the Toyama Plan which aims to advance the level of Japan's top 30 universities to the world's highest level have been revealed. MEXT (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) requested Yen 42.2 billion (ca. \$352 million) for this plan in the JFY2002 budget. Each subject in a Ph.D. course will be regarded as one unit which will receive competitive funds of Yen 100-500 million (ca. 0.8-4 million) per year for five years with an interim review in the second year. The funds will be provided to 10 fields, including life science, medical science, mathematics and physics, chemistry and earth science, and each of these fields will have sub fields. During JFY2002 fifty subjects in five fields will be selected to receive the competitive funds. A more detailed implementation plan will be compiled by the end of the current calendar year and the solicitation will start in January, ending in March 2002. (Summary translation of an article on Kagaku Shinbun (Science Newspaper) - 9/7/01)

7. **[Japan Scores Low on School Spending]** Government and private sector spending for education in Japan accounted for only 4.72 percent of the gross domestic product in 1998, the lowest level among the Group of Seven major industrialized nations, according to statistics released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. It was more than a full point lower than the 5.75 percent average among OECD member nations. "The simultaneous decline in education expenditures and in the general scholastic ability of students shows the deterioration of our nation's education system, Kazumasa Niimi, a senior researcher at Japan Research Institute Ltd., said. "The government has been stingy in allocating the education budget in the name of promoting education free from pressure, which is contrary to the educational reforms of the United States and European countries, which have increased their education budgets." (Excerpt from the Daily Yomiuri - 9/23/01)
